

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Information for the public

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Post-traumatic stress disorder: the care you should expect

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a type of anxiety caused by very distressing or frightening experiences. It can develop after a single traumatic event, like a serious accident. It can also be caused by repeated or prolonged experiences like abuse, or living or working in a war zone. PTSD can happen to anyone, at any age. PTSD usually involves reliving the event through vivid memories or nightmares, feeling angry or 'on edge', having negative thoughts and feelings, problems thinking clearly and difficulty sleeping. It's common to have some of these symptoms in the first few weeks after a trauma and most people who have early symptoms do not go on to develop PTSD. But for an important few, PTSD becomes an ongoing problem that makes everyday life very difficult, both for them and for their family, friends or colleagues.

We want this guideline to make a difference to children, young people and adults with PTSD, and their families, by:

- raising awareness that although PTSD is a serious condition it can respond very well to treatment, even years after a trauma
- making sure everyone with distressing PTSD symptoms gets the right help even without a formal diagnosis of PTSD
- improving care for people showing early symptoms of PTSD after a recent trauma, including by offering active monitoring or psychological therapy
- helping healthcare professionals decide which therapies and treatments to offer people of all ages with PTSD symptoms.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are usually best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there aspects of the treatment that worry you more than others?
- What happens if you don't want to have particular treatments?

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

[The NHS website](#) has more information about PTSD.

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families](#), 020 7794 2313
- [Anxiety UK](#), 03444 775 774
- [Combat Stress](#), 0800 138 1619 (forces' veterans and their families) or 0800 323 4444 (serving forces' personnel and their families)
- [PTSD Resolution](#) (forces' veterans, reservists and families), 0300 302 0551
- [PTSD UK](#)
- [Rethink Mental Illness](#), 0300 5000 927
- [The Royal British Legion](#) (armed forces community), 0808 802 8080
- [The Survivors Trust](#) (survivors of rape, sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse), 0808 801 0818

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by PTSD and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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